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The hedgehog and the fox; the history of victimisation surveys from a Trans-Atlantic perspective

Jan van Dijk and Matthieu de Castelbajac

1 Introductory remarks

In his PhD thesis defended at the University of Versailles on November 12, 2014, Matthieu de Castelbajac traces back the early history of victimisation surveys in the USA and Europe with a focus on the National Crime Victims Surveys in the USA (starting in 1973), the Dutch Victimisation Survey (1973), the British Crime Survey (1982) and The International Crime Victims Survey (1988) (Castelbajac 2014). The present chapter is largely based on this study, supplemented by additional considerations regarding the Dutch survey and the ICVS. Firstly, we will try to understand why the American studies in the early 1970s developed into the first ever full-fledged survey, whereas earlier, similar attempts in Scandinavia did not get off the ground. What explains this change of fortune of crime surveys? Next we will analyse in some detail the original ideas behind the American survey and how these have shaped the National Crime Victim Survey (NCVS) ever since. In the third paragraph we will discuss the different trajectory of the first victimisation surveys in Europe and how these have meandered into many different directions over the years. Finally, we will reflect on the foiled plans of the European Commission for an EU wide comparative survey.

2 Scandinavian preludes and the NCVS

Although the pioneers of the first USA national survey are acknowledged as the inventors of the victimisation surveys, reference is often made to a preceding proposal by the Finnish criminologist Inkeri Antilla to develop such surveys in 1965 (Antilla 1965). Castelbajac (2014) disproves the widely held belief that Antilla ever made such proposal. In the authentic text of the publication, Antilla actually dismisses the idea of approaching the study of the dark numbers of crime from the victim's perspective. In her view such study would risk shifting attention away from much needed policy reforms on behalf of young offenders. Out of these political misgivings, she opted for self-

reported delinquency studies rather than for a victimisation survey.¹ Although Anttila's historical proposal appears to be a myth, surveys on victimisation have indeed been carried out in Scandinavia that preceded the American survey experience by several years. In 1945 Gallup carried out a national poll on recent experiences with crime through one open interview question. The results on the public's experiences with various broad categories of crime were duly reported in the Finnish media. Curiously, victimisation by crime was framed in these reports as part of the demoralising impact of the Second World War.² This framing possibly explains the lack of any follow up to the Finnish study for two decades or more. In 1970 Swedish criminologist Kurt Sveri conducted a local pilot study on victimisation in a Swedish city. This unpublished study was not followed up either, apparently because of low response rates but probably also for lack of political support. In 1970 the Finnish Institute of Criminology launched a survey on victimisation by violent crime that was later reproduced in Norway, Denmark and Sweden (Aromaa 1974). However, it was not before the 1990s that Scandinavian governments started to take up an interest in launching dedicated surveys on criminal victimisation by different types of crime and related topics.³

The prehistory of the surveys in Scandinavia is illuminating because it demonstrates the determining impact of politics on the development of this new instrument to measure crime. In Finland crime was a media topic in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. It would not return to the political agenda for three or four decades. For a long time the debate on crime in Finland would remain focused on prison reform. Equally telling is the political motivation of Inkeri Anttila to recommend the conduct of self-reported delinquency studies rather than a victimisation survey, the latter being an instrument already pilot tested in her country in 1945. At the time the focus of criminologists on the rehabilitation of offenders seems to have made them wary of a possible victimological agenda. In other words, crime in Scandina-

1 To put this choice in a proper perspective it should be pointed out that criminal sentencing policies in Finland in the 1960s were among the most punitive in Europe. It is also worth mentioning that as founding director of The European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, affiliated with the United Nations (HEUNI), Inkeri Anttila chooses victims' rights as the topic of the opening conference of the institute in 1976.

2 In the framework of the United Nations crime was similarly debated as collateral damage of the war. In 1948, the Social Affairs Committee of the United Nations decided to start collecting crime statistics as a basis for its work on the prevention of crime and treatment of offenders. A "Statistical Report on the State of Crime 1937 – 1946", was published in 1950. This report provides an analysis of the methodological difficulties of collecting international crime statistics rather than an assessment of crime rates in war-torn countries. In hindsight it is amazing that policy makers at the time were more concerned about emerging problems of common criminality and juvenile delinquency than about the devastating and lasting impact of the genocides committed by the Soviet, Nazi and Japanese regimes.

3 For example, the first general crime victim survey in Sweden was launched in 2006.

via was not a major concern and to the extent that it was, the focus was on understanding and supporting offenders rather than on caring about victims. In this political context the development of large scale victimisation surveys was far-fetched. Swedish criminologist Kurt Sveri was decades ahead of his time.

The history of the national surveys of the USA has been reconstructed in great detail by Castelbajac (2014). In his view the surveys were developed by two independently operating research teams which would eventually join forces. One of the teams was made up of survey expert Peter Rossi who involved Philip Ennis as his partner. The other team consisted of Albert Reiss Jr. (sociologist of crime) and, more prominently, Albert Biderman (sociologist specialised in army research and protagonist of the social indicators movement).

Against the background of the aborted Scandinavian experience, two factors in the American story of the surveys stand out. First, there is the emergence of crime as a political concern at the federal level. Although Peter Rossi had been contemplating the conduct of a victimisation survey already in 1962, he relaunched his efforts in 1965 with a view of engaging the National Commission on Crime newly established by President Johnson as a countermove against the law and order agenda of the Republican Party.⁴ In the inner circle of this Commission, the sociologist Lloyd E. Ohlin persuaded his fellow commission members that the available administrative statistics on crime could not be reliably used as a measure of the volume and trends of crime and should be replaced by survey-based data. Without the financial and institutional support of the Johnson Administration the initiatives of both teams would most likely have soon withered away. The production of survey-based crime statistics requires considerable funds which can only be found if the issues of crime have become a political priority. The second determining factor in the prehistory of the NCVS seems to us the role of social scientists in promoting a new perspective on crime that challenged the official perspective espoused by police statistics. Initially, Rossi's plans for a survey were questioned by the criminal justice establishment. As a non-criminologist pondering about a possible victimisation survey to be funded by the government, Rossi sought the support from the American Bar Association (ABA)). The ABA's initial response was dismissive of the idea that crime victims as lay persons could contribute anything useful to the measurement of crime ("is not worth serious consideration, on its face"). In the eyes of the ABA's ex-

4 It could be argued that the law and order movement in the 1960s was primarily fuelled by the civil rights movement and opposition to the Vietnam War. However, in the 1964 presidential campaign of Republican candidate Barry Goldwater street crime was added to the equation.

perts, victims simply did not qualify as credible sources of information on crime. As discussed above, misgivings about giving victims a voice had earlier dissuaded Inkeri Anttila in 1965 from proposing the launch of victimisation surveys in Finland. On both sides of the Atlantic then, the prevailing ideology of offender rehabilitation, and a concurring lack of appreciation of crime victims, seems initially to have inhibited the development of victim-centred surveys on crime.

The Finnish and American cases suggest that two factors are prerequisites for large scale victimisation surveys. First, governments must feel compelled to invest in better crime statistics as part of a political strategy to address urgent problems of crime. Second, the mental block among criminal justice experts to turn to the side of crime victims, and to give them voice in defining the problems of crime, must be removed. It was sociologists like Biderman and Reiss who were directly responsible for offering a new way of thinking about crime⁵. But the presence of representatives of the victims' rights movement in the Crime Commission may have helped to overcome resistance to the idea of interviewing ordinary people about their personal experiences of crime. The two prerequisites of a fully-fledged victimisation survey were met in the USA in 1965. In Europe this confluence of factors occurred in the Netherlands in the early 1970s. In the latter country the rise of crime volume, and a call for law and order, emerged as a major political issue in the national elections of 1971. The first victim support projects in the country were launched not much later, in 1973 (Wemmers 1996). According to Antony Pemberton, the two factors were personified in Jan van Dijk who as in house researcher at the Dutch Ministry of Justice was the driving force behind both the Dutch victimisation surveys and the development of victim support schemes (Pemberton 2008). Around the same time similar forces were at play in the United Kingdom where social researchers like Ron Clarke, Mike Hough and Pat Mayhew gained a foothold at the Home Office. It seems no coincidence that victimisation surveys were in Europe first introduced on a national scale in

5 The archives of the National Commission on Crime show no evidence that representatives of the emerging movement for victims' rights in the USA promoted or supported the proposal for victimisation surveys. However, the results of the victimisation survey, designed by Rossi/Ennis, are extensively presented in the Commission's report in a separate paragraph about victims, focussing on the overexposure of low income groups and non-whites. The latter part of the paragraph discusses the establishment of state compensation for victims of violent crime (US Government, 1967). The attention for the plight of crime victims in the Commission may have helped to reduce resistance to victim-focused surveys to determine the extent of crime. American criminologist Gilbert Geis (1990), one of the consultants of the National Commission, observes that the victims' rights movement gained impetus thanks to the Crime Commission and the research it sponsored, notably the victimisation surveys. Although victimisation surveys cannot be seen as an offshoot of the victims movement, the conclusion seems warranted that in the USA the growing awareness of the needs of crime victims and victim-based crime surveying have mutually reinforced each other.

the Netherlands and the United Kingdom and not, for example, in Germany or the Scandinavian countries where both law and order campaigns and lobbying for victims' rights remained comparatively modest till the end of the 20th century.

3 Measuring the true volume of crime

In the USA the leading idea behind what would later become the National Crime Victims Survey (NCVS) has been that a victimisation survey should try to estimate the “true volume“ of acts defined as criminal by the federal criminal code. As documented by Castelbajac (2014), the team of Rossi and Ennis experimented with questions which directly reflected the legal definitions of crime (Rossi 1967). Biderman's first questionnaire was structured differently. Building on his experiences of interviewing army personal, he designed screeners using colloquial language. These were followed up by sets of detailed questions about the precise nature of the incident. The answers to these follow up questions were used to classify the reported incidents as specific criminal offences during data processing (Biderman 1967). In the design of the first version of the so-called National Crime Survey (NCS) the legalistic approach of Rossi, developed in consultation with the American Bar Association, seems to have prevailed. In this approach the respondent is construed as a lay person sharing information on acts which have come to his/her attention which fully meet the legal definitions in the criminal code. Tellingly, in his pilot study for the NCVS Ennis asked legal experts whether incidents reported to the interviewer could be classified as a criminal offence under American law (Ennis 1967). In other words, the survey tried to supplement existing administrative statistics on crimes known to the police with a count of identical acts that for various reasons have remained unrecorded. Through the use of relatively large sample sizes – ranging from twenty to sixty thousand – the American surveys aimed at estimating with small margins of error the absolute numbers of acts falling under the official definitions of the main categories of crime incorporated in the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR): e. g. aggravated assault, forcible rape, theft, burglary and motor vehicle theft. In this tradition much attention is given to comparisons between volumes and trends of absolute numbers of these offences according to the UCR and NCVS (Lynch /Addington 2007). The key terms of such analyses are convergence or divergence of the two measures. In line with this orientation, the Census Bureau carried out (reverse) record checks to test the extent to which crimes reported to the police according to interviewers actually showed up in

police administrations, or vice versa (e. g. Schneider 1978, 81).⁶ Although the main redesign of the NCVS allowed for the exploration of new directions under the auspices of Albert Biderman, the Department of Justice and the Census Bureau have never abandoned their efforts to try to refine and calibrate the legalistic approach. The American efforts at crime surveying seek to bring the art of measuring the dark numbers of crime to ever greater perfection. Although the available datasets were occasionally used for secondary analyses by external scholars of e. g. risks of victimisation (Hindelang et al. 1978), the annual reports on the NCVS of the Bureau of Justice Statistics still focus on the estimated absolute numbers of crime (e. g. BJS 2014).⁷ As a consequence, topics such as fear of crime, preventive responses, reasons for reporting or not reporting to the police or opinions about the police, although occasionally included in supplements to the questionnaire, remain of marginal importance. Although the NCVS is somewhat more pluralistic than the original NCS, it remains in essence a legalistic-statistical survey as the one originally designed by Rossi and Ennis. At a workshop with data users convened by the BJS in 2008 many proposals were made to broaden the scope of the NCVS (Addington 2008). Few of these suggestions have been heeded. On account of its single-mindedness, the NCVS model can, in the dichotomous typology of the philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1953), be classified as that of the Hedgehog, an animal focussed on harnessing just one superb trick.⁸

4 A European model?

Two of the very first victimisation surveys in Europe were strongly inspired by the experimental studies of Ennis and the ensuing NCS. This is true for the Zurich/Stuttgart/Gottingen studies of the early 1970s and the survey by Fiselier in 1973 in the urban areas of the Netherlands (Fiselier 1978). Follow-

6 In 1979 the Research and Documentation Centre carried out a small reverse record check on the results of the Dutch survey in the city of Utrecht (Van Dijk 1992). The results were almost identical to those of Schneider (1978; 1981), in the sense that in roughly 60 % of the cases victim reports could be found back in the police records. In an external publication of 1992 Van Dijk downplays the significance of the imperfect match and stresses possible flaws in police administrations. He also points at the many other purposes of victimisation surveys such as risks analyses, measures of reporting patterns and public attitudes, and international comparisons, besides producing a perfect measure of the national volume of crime. In a replication study in Amsterdam Elffers and Averdijk (2012) found a somewhat lower match which they in the American tradition interpret as a blow to the credibility of survey-based estimates of crime.

7 Tellingly, Biderman was critical of the analyses of Hindelang et al. of differential victimisation risks, arguing that priority should be given to further improvements in the measurement of victimisation (Castelbajac 2014).

8 Cited by Erasmus of Rotterdam in 1500: *Multa novit vulpes, verum echinus unum magnum* ("the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing").

ing the example set by the team preparing for the NCS, Fiselier duly carried out a forward record check with police data: interviewing persons who had reported crimes to the police. In his report he also made a detailed comparison of estimated and officially recorded numbers of offenses. The subsequent national victimisation studies in Europe such as the Dutch and British surveys also had much in common with the American model: they all struggled with the same technical challenges of sampling, cognitive testing of the questions, memory loss and, more recently, declining response rates. Having said this, it should be noted that the European protagonists of national victimisation surveys have from the outset pursued a distinctly different agenda than their American peers. Several differences can be identified. Firstly, the surveys' questioning on victimisation experiences was less legalistic.⁹ Typically, the first national Dutch surveys asked respondents for example whether their "house had been burgled" or whether they had been personally a victim of "pickpocketing" (Van Dijk/Vianen 1977). Although burglary and pickpocketing are colloquial concepts, commonly used by criminologists, neither can be found in the Dutch Criminal Code. The questionnaire items are formulated in concrete, colloquial language which stays closer to the respondents' perceptions of crime than the terminology used in the NCVS. Responses are to a much lesser extent reclassified during data analysis on the basis of answers to follow up questions to fit legal categories. Secondly, in the early European surveys sample sizes remained relatively small.¹⁰ This is especially obvious in the case of the early Scandinavian, French and German surveys, usually conducted with samples of no more than 1.000 respondents. The researchers did apparently not aspire to the production of estimates of the absolute numbers of crimes within narrow margins of error. They contented themselves with rough estimates of the proportion of the public exposed to broadly defined forms of criminal victimisation. Key results of the surveys were expressed as prevalence rates of victimisation over the last twelve months. The grossing up of results to estimates of absolute numbers was not a primary goal.¹¹ In the first comprehensive report on the Dutch survey (Van Dijk/Via-

9 Early examples of the Finnish victimisation survey broadened the scope to include injuries caused by traffic and domestic accidents (Castelbajac 2014). In the view of the designer, and funders, the issue whether injuries were caused by criminal offences or other events was apparently seen as of little relevance. In France and the Netherlands the national surveys were also incorporated in broader surveys on the quality of life for some years (Wittebrood 2004; Zauberman 2014).

10 Sample sizes of the early European surveys ranged from 1.000 in Germany to 4.000 in the Netherlands. The much larger sample sizes of the BCS and the Dutch Safety Survey in later years were not introduced to produce more accurate estimates of absolute numbers at the national level but to produce comparable estimates of geographical areas such as police districts or cities.

11 The comparisons in Europe are further complicated by the fact that national figures of police-recorded crimes are often less rigorously standardized than in the USA, or not available

nen 1977), for example, no attempt is made to relate the published prevalence rates of victimisation to the numbers of officially recorded crimes.

In sum, European researchers appear to have been less concerned about the lack of legal expertise of their respondents. The victims' experiences are accepted as valid in their own right. In their view perceived victimisations by crime are, in the words of Thomas' theorem, real in their consequences.¹² The perception to have been victimised shapes a broad set of cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses such as fear, preventive responses, reporting to the police and changes in attitudes towards state institutions. From a criminological perspective these topics are of interest in their own right.

Over the years the European surveys evolved into surveys measuring a broad and variable set of crime-related perceptions and responses and their distribution across segments of the population. Attention focussed on the notification of the police, treatment of reporting victims by the police and on analysing victimisation risks of different segments of the population with a view of developing and testing theories which can be used to design and target crime prevention policies or adequate victim support. The European surveys, launched after the emergence of the victims' rights movement, filled the incident forms with varying questions on the victims' experiences and responses rather than on the precise legal nature of the criminal act as such.¹³ Typically, in the early Dutch survey much attention was given to reporting to and recording by the police, and in later versions victims were asked about possible post-traumatic stress symptoms (Wittebrood 2004). Parallel to the first Dutch survey a national study was commissioned in 1973 by the Research and Documentation Centre about public attitudes towards crime, law enforcement and criminal justice (Van Dijk 1979). Many of these topics were later incorporated in the regular victimisation survey. The Dutch and British surveys were eventually redesigned, and relabelled as Public Safety or Police Monitors. In these surveys questions on victimisation make up just a small part of the survey's questionnaire and of the regular reports of their results.¹⁴ In France, Switzerland, Italy and Belgium too, the surveys try to do much more than just

at the federal level at all (e.g. in Belgium and Switzerland). This is another reason why the European literature on the issues of convergence or divergence is limited compared to the one in the USA (Van Dijk 2009).

- 12 It could be argued that this was also the initial approach of Biderman and Al Reiss Jr, both sociologists in the tradition of the Chicago School.
- 13 Evidence for the impact of the victims' movement on the surveys in Europe is the inclusion of some questions to victims on the need of specialised victim support in the questionnaire of Fiselier of 1973 at the request of a Dutch NGO promoting the launch of such programmes.
- 14 In the annual reports of the Dutch security monitor results concerning rates of victimisation make up a minor part of the contents (Central Bureau of Statistics 2014), in contrast to the

measuring the dark numbers of crime. This European model of crime surveying serves many purposes besides estimating the “true volume of crime” and is more versatile. Using the terminology of Isaiah Berlin (1953), it can be characterised as that of the Fox.

In his PhD thesis Castelbajac reconstructed the trajectory of the Dutch survey which was in the field for the first time in 1973 and has been continued on an annual basis ever since (Smit/Van Dijk 2014). In his view this first European national survey on victimisation by various types of crime bears the mark of the involvement of criminologists such as Van Dijk. The first fully-fledged reports about the survey published in 1977 and 1979 presented victimisation prevalence rates, rather than grossed up absolute numbers (Van Dijk/Vianen 1977; Van Dijk/Steinmetz 1979/1980)¹⁵. Both reports extensively report on victimisation risks of different segments of the population and on differential reporting by victims to the police as well as to the selective responses to these reports given by the police. The victimological drift of the early Dutch survey is neatly reflected in the title of the first international publication on the Dutch survey, *Beyond Measuring the Volume of Crime* (Van Dijk/Steinmetz 1983). The survey has been increasingly used as vehicle for victimological risk analyses and the monitoring of victim policies, a tradition pursued with analyses of data from the ICVS (Van Dijk/Groenhuijsen 2007).¹⁶

annual reports on the NCVS of the USA which are largely devoted to estimated absolute numbers of crime (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2014).

- 15 In the report of 1998 estimated numbers are compared to police figures but the authors take the view that “victimisation surveys should in principle be used as an independent measurement instrument of (petty) crime”.
- 16 Fiselier and Van Dijk, at the time both lecturers at the Criminological Institute of tentatively Nijmegen University, published a joint conference paper on *Studies in Victimology* in 1974 (Van Dijk/Fiselier 1974). In this report Fiselier presents preliminary findings of his city survey from 1973 and Van Dijk of a study among victims of violent crimes recorded by the police about the impact of the crime and their attitudes towards criminal justice. When van Dijk took up a new position as research coordinator at the Research and Documentation Centre of the Ministry of Justice (RDC) at the end of 1974 one of his responsibilities was the further development of a national victimisation survey. When he joined the RDC the survey was already ongoing in an embryonic form (Buikhuisen 1975). The first round of the national survey in 1973 was contracted out to an Amsterdam-based affiliate of Gallup USA (NIPO). From 1975 onwards Van Dijk collaborated with staff of Gallup/NIPO to expand and redesign the existing questionnaire with questions on more types of crime as well as on reporting patterns and recording practices of the police (Van Dijk/Vianen 1977). As a consequence, the core questions on victimisation used in the later national Dutch surveys have indeed, as correctly observed by Castelbajac, not been designed by statisticians. It seems likely that NIPO consulted their parent company in the USA on their new assignment. We consulted current staff of Gallup USA in order to check the personal memories of the first author that a core questionnaire was already available. They confirmed that Gallup USA had carried out a survey in the USA in December 1972 on experiences of citizens with victimisations by six types of crime (personal communication Stephanie Holgado, 23-10 2014). The questionnaires used in 1973 and 1974 in the pilot versions of the Dutch survey with inter alia special questions on bicycle theft, are not identical to the American one of 1972 but they were defi-

Castelbajac documents how experiences with both the NCVS and the Dutch survey impacted on the design of the national British survey in 1982. American expert Wesley Skogan, speaking at a seminar convened by the Home Office about the possible launch of a British Crime Survey, explicitly cautioned against a ready adoption of the NCS that was at the time being redesigned. In our view the final questionnaire of the British Crime Survey seems indeed much more akin to the Dutch than to the American one.¹⁷ This is also true for the Swiss survey, and for almost all other national surveys designed in Europe thereafter. With its varying modules on different topics, the British Crime Survey was later restructured into a so-called Police Monitor with much emphasis on perceptions of safety and confidence in local policing. It became subsequently the model of several other European surveys, such as, *inter alia*, the ongoing Swedish and French national surveys. The Belgian survey, discontinued in 2008, is directly modelled after the ongoing Dutch Public Safety Survey (*Veiligheidsmonitor*), which resembles the British Police Monitor, currently called the Crime Survey of England and Wales. The questionnaires of older surveys in France were clearly not modelled after the American survey either. They maintained a clear focus on the role of the victim as gatekeeper of the criminal justice system (Zauberman/Levy 1991; Zauberman 2013).

The first German national survey was part of the first round of the International Crime Victims Survey in 1988 which was modelled after the existing European surveys (Mayhew/Van Dijk 2011). This international survey was repeated in Germany in 2005 and 2010 with funding from the European Commission. The independently run German survey from 2012 was part of a much larger research project on security issues *Barometer Sicherheit Deutschland* (Security Monitor Germany). The larger project contains extensive modules on fear of crime besides one on victimisation. The involvement from researchers from different academic disciplines in the project besides criminology (sociology, psychology, communication studies, ethics and law) testifies that this is much more than a statistical exercise to measure the dark numbers of crime. It seems also worth noting that the survey was not funded by ministries responsible for the control of crime but by the Ministry of Culture and Science.

nitely based on expertise of polling experts and, possibly, in part based on the Gallup survey of 1972.

17 Although the impact of the Dutch survey on the BCS has never been documented (Hough/Maxfield 2010), a comparison of the questionnaire of the first BCS with the one of the first Dutch surveys shows a striking resemblance.

Castelbajac (2014) notes that Pat Mayhew, key researcher of the British Crime Survey, as well as Swiss criminologist Martin Killias were both natural partners of Jan van Dijk for the design of an International Crime Survey in 1988. These three criminologists could indeed build on shared experiences with highly similar, national surveys and therefore easily reach consensus on a core questionnaire for the ICVS largely based on existing national surveys in Europe. The use of simple definitions of crime types in colloquial terms as usual in the European national surveys was felt to cover the common ground of the public's experiences with ordinary crimes across the (Western) world. Sample sizes were kept at a minimum ($n = 2,000$). In the ICVS reports no attempts were made to gross up the victimisation prevalence rates and make comparisons with police-recorded crimes. The ICVS reports focus on prevalence rates and risks analyses and on differential reporting rates (Van Dijk et al. 1990). The ICVS was from the outset also used to collect comparative data on the implementation of situational crime prevention measures, fear of crime and the need of and reception of victim assistance (Van Kesteren et al. 2014). In his thesis Castelbajac characterises it as a typically European victimisation survey, prepared by criminologists, and theoretically informed by lifestyle/exposure or opportunity theory.

Although American crime survey experts like Wesley Skogan and Jim Lynch have been very supportive of the ICVS from the start, it is hard to see how such an initiative could ever have evolved out of the model of the NCVS with its entrenched, exclusive focus on estimating the volume of offences as defined under United States law.¹⁸ The ICVS is a logical offshoot of the European, criminologically or victimologically inspired model of crime surveying. As said, the European model of victimisation surveys seems in the dichotomy of Isaiah Berlin to stand for the fox. With the development of the ICVS it has proven to be a cosmopolitan, boundary-crossing fox to boot.

18 In 1979 the OECD convened an expert group to explore the feasibility of a standardised survey on indicators of objective and subjective insecurity. Although representatives of the US Department of Justice took part in some of the meetings, they did not put their stamp on the proposal. The pilot survey was designed by Finnish criminologists, including Kauko Aromaa, who would later join the ICVS. It was piloted in the US, Finland and the Netherlands (Castelbajac 2014; Van Dijk 1978). To our knowledge the only attempt to export the NCS-based American expertise to Europe was a local survey in Lisbon, Portugal designed by Gilbert Geis, formerly consultant of the Crime Commission (Geis 1987). The Portuguese survey, conducted in 1989, sought to make comparisons with official crime statistics but went beyond the NCS model by adopting several questions on perceptions of crime and opinions on the police. Portugal joined the ICVS in 2000 (Van Dijk et al. 2008).

5 Conclusions: the way forward in Europe

We have documented that national surveys of several European nations have more design features in common with each other than with that of the NCVS in the USA. In spite of belonging to the same family of criminologically inspired surveys, and the use of very similar screeners on victimisation experiences, the European surveys fail to produce comparable results (e.g. Van Dijk et al. 1990)¹⁹. Even minor differences in the formulation and/or sequencing of items on victimisation have been found to render the results incomparable. The launch of a standardised International Crime Victims Survey by European criminologists in 1988, involved in some of the national surveys, was therefore a logical next step. Besides several European nations, early participants were the US and Canada. In later years the ICVS branched out globally under the aegis of the United Nations Criminal Justice Research Institute in Italy. The survey went into the field for the first time in 1989 in thirteen nations. With some adjustments, the survey has since been carried out in five subsequent sweeps, at intervals of four or five years (1992, 1996, 2000, 2005 and 2010). The last round in 2010 was conducted in 13 countries, including five EU countries (Van Dijk 2012). In 2005 and 2010 the execution of the survey was co-funded by the European Commission. Thereafter the survey was repeated, inter alia, in Luxembourg (2013), China (2014) and, with funding of the Inter-American Development Bank, in several Caribbean nations (2014) as well, with funding of USAID, in Kyrgyzstan (2015). Altogether the ICVS has been carried out once or more in 90 countries from all world regions to date.²⁰

The EU Action Plan 2006-2010 envisaged the development of comparative crime statistics among the Member States including a common module for victimisation surveys. Several expert groups within the framework of the European Commission confirmed the need of a standardised victimisation survey of the European Union. Technical groundwork for a Europe-wide follow up to the ICVS 2010 was done by an expert group of Eurostat, the statistical arm of the European Commission (Van Dijk et al. 2010). The questions on victimisation experiences were mainly taken from the core set of the ICVS. Following the European tradition the planned survey “European Safety Survey (EUSASU)” also included a set of questions on feelings of unsafety, satisfaction with the treatment by the police, general attitudes towards the po-

19 Several attempts have in the past been made to make the results of national surveys comparable by reconstructing variables post hoc but these efforts have always proven to be unsatisfactory (e.g. Mayhew 1987).

20 The full dataset is available for secondary analyses. It can be downloaded from a website of Lausanne University (<http://www3.unil.ch/wpmu/icvs/> – Download from 11. 10. 2014).

lice and the reception of victim support. In most member states, including Germany, pilots were carried out with an earlier version of the draft questionnaire (Aromaa et al. 2007). With a view of collecting more data on cyber-crime and on the reception of victims by police forces in line with the 2012 Victims Directive, some additional questions were formulated. A substantial budget was earmarked for data collection in all member states in 2013. Unfortunately the European Parliament in 2012 advised negatively about the survey and no decision on actual data collection has since been taken (Van Dijk 2012).²¹

The main argument raised against the EUSASU, besides its costs, was that it would duplicate existing national surveys. This argument is unconvincing for several reasons. First, national surveys are annually executed in just a handful of Member States, notably the Netherlands, England/Wales, France and Sweden. In the majority of Member States such surveys have only been conducted once or twice, often within the framework of rounds of the ICVS. The unique added value of the EUSASU would not just be that the surveys would be conducted across the EU with minimal overhead costs, but that they would produce *comparable* information on crime, reporting to the police and the reception of victim support as well as on fear of crime and trust in the police. Such comparative data could be used for benchmarking anti-crime and pro-victim strategies across the EU and for determining the impact of EU legislation. Without the EUSASU the only available information on levels and trends of crime in the EU are the numbers of crimes recorded by police forces as collected by Eurostat (Clarke 2013). The use of the police figures of recorded crime of Eurostat will inevitably result in erroneous conclusions, for example that levels of crime are consistently the highest in Northern Europe and the lowest in Bulgaria and Rumania.²² Without a standardised victimisation sur-

21 The conduct of such survey required legislation and a proposal was submitted to the European Parliament in 2011 (2011/0146 (COD)). On September 12, 2012 the European Parliament, at the advice of a rapporteur, the British Member of the European Parliament, Timothy Kirkhope (Conservative), rejected the Commission's proposal (A7-0365/2012- European Parliament). The survey was critiqued for its inclusion of "subjective" and "sensitive" questions. This criticism shows a lack of understanding of the proven methodology of victimisation surveys on personal experiences with common crimes. Ironically, the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency has conducted dedicated victimisation surveys on comparatively more subjective and sensitive topics like violence against women, hate crime and harassment and discrimination of LGBT people (e. g. FRA 2013).

22 Cognisant of the pitfalls of comparing statistics of police-recorded crimes as measures of the levels of crime due to differences in legal definitions, reporting patterns and recording practices, Eurostat refrains from calculating rates per 100.000 inhabitants, except for homicide. This cautious publication policy cannot hide strikingly odd findings such as that Sweden in 2012 recorded a total of 1,4 million criminal offences and Rumania, a country with a considerably larger population, less than 300.00.

vey, EU policies on crime and public safety will continue to be designed, implemented and evaluated in a thick statistical mist.

In the meantime, the United States' NCVS survey, after difficult times under the Bush Administration, is now once again sufficiently funded to continue producing credible estimates of crime at the federal level. An important new asset of the NCVS is data on the proportion of crime victims receiving specialised assistance. Similar comprehensive crime victimisation surveys are conducted in more and more nations across the world (Aebi/Linde 2014). Meetings have recently been convened by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Mexico City with a view of launching a new, comparative crime victimisation survey in Latin America. In contrast, plans to conduct a comparative survey in Europe are stagnating. Although the European Union has a mandate to start collecting comparable statistics on crime, and extensive, and expensive, technical groundwork by Eurostat has already been done, an EU wide crime victimisation survey seems unlikely to be executed any time soon. A standardised crime survey, building on the best practices of the European national surveys, will for the time being remain a sorely missed opportunity for Europe.

6 Summary

- Extensive desk research and interviews with key persons has led Matthieu de Castelbajac to the conclusion that American and European victimisation surveys have been developed largely independently of each other, and have pursued fundamentally different objectives from the outset.
- The American National Crime Victim Survey (NCVS) aims at the production of estimated numbers of crimes committed that can be compared to the statistics of police-recorded crimes (UCR). The survey can be characterised as a legalistic-statistical exercise.
- The early European surveys like the Dutch and British Surveys aim at measuring the experiences with crime and the police and feelings of unsafety of the public. The surveys can be characterised as criminologically and victimologically inspired.
- Both the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) and the second generation of victimisation surveys in Europe including the German survey of 2012 stand in the European tradition of crime surveying.
- The statistics published by Eurostat of police-recorded crimes, showing that levels of crime are the lowest in Eastern Europe and the highest in

Northern Europe, give a distorted picture of the realities of crime and corruption. The EU is in urgent need of a standardised victimisation survey among the member states along the lines of the ICVS.

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